

On Gifts & Gratitude

Written by L.A. Plume

Wednesday, 11 January 2017 09:48 - Last Updated Wednesday, 11 January 2017 10:21



Dear L.A.,

What has happened to simple good manners? A close friend of mine has two children, who are now 10 and 12, a girl and a boy. Both are polite and will engage in conversation with their mom's adult friends. Every Christmas and birthday, I give each a well-thought-out present, always something they'd like. But I have yet to receive a thank you of any sort from either child.

I feel as if I'm tossing presents down a black hole. Do parents not teach their children about bread-and-butter thank-you notes anymore? Are kids so glued to their cell phones that they can't be bothered to write a note of gratitude, make a quick phone call, or even zip off a quick text to state their appreciation, for goodness sake? I guess if it bothers me, I could discontinue giving them gifts but I so enjoy doing it. Is there any tactful way I could mention this to my friend, their mother, without seeming tacky?

Stumped Fairy Godmother

Dear Fairy Godmother,

When I was a child I had an "aunt" who was the best friend of my real aunt and she sent along the most wonderful gifts for me for my birthday and Christmas (I still remember a lipstick that had a mirror that rolled out of the case!). I suspect that I may have been a little lax in the thank you note department because my real aunt informed me that if I didn't write thank you notes, there would be no more presents. How about if you got "your" children thank you note cards with their names on them and give them to their mother saying something like "I thought this might make it easier for the children to remember to write their thank you notes".

Thank you notes, and bread and butter notes as well, are quickly becoming one of those things of the past, just like invitations that are sent in the mail. (FYI for those who aren't clear about the distinction, thank you notes are for gifts, bread and butter notes are for when you've stayed over at someone's house). The thing is, we take the time to think about just the right gift, find it, pay for it, wrap it and get it to the recipient; to dash off a note of thanks is quick and easy by comparison. I suspect that people are intimidated by writing thank you notes, feeling that they need to be literary works of art. However, "Dear Helen, I absolutely adore the tufted titmouse you crocheted for me!" is quite sufficient. "Dear Mery, The "peacock crossing" sign is absolutely adorable even though there are no peacocks within 100 miles of here. It will look

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lovely hanging in the garage and will perk me up every time I see it. Much love,” or “The blue scarf is the perfect compliment to my new plaid dress and I can’t wait to wear it,” are short and sweet and all that’s necessary to show your appreciation.

L.A.Plume

Dear Ms. Plume,

Under what circumstances is it acceptable to return a gift to the person who gave it to you if it simply doesn't suit you? (I received six sets of socks this Christmas and I don't even wear socks.)

Staying Barefoot

Dear Barefoot, That's a tricky question without a good answer. It all depends on the nature of your relationship with the gift giver. We've all received gifts that aren't quite on target and we should probably hope the intention of the giver was better than our attitude about the gift. One time I was in the local thrift shop and saw a necklace I had given to someone who clearly didn't find it as enchanting as I had hoped, but I was shopping with a different friend and she saw the necklace and bought it, so somehow these gifts may find their right homes. If you can't use something, give it to some person or charity that can, but you might not want to do it too close to home. Thank the giver no matter what – you're thanking them for the thought and the effort as well as the actual gift.

L.A.Plume